

WU-TZU

1. Planning for the State

Wu Ch'i, wearing the distinctive garb of a Confucian, had an audience with Marquis Wen of Wei to discuss the strategic crux of warfare. Marquis Wen said: "I do not like military affairs."

Wu Ch'i replied: "From the visible I can fathom the concealed. From the past I can discern the future. How can your lordship say this topic does not accord with his thoughts? Right now, throughout the four seasons you have the skins of slaughtered animals covered with vermillion lacquer, painted with variegated colors, and embellished with glistening images of rhinoceroses and elephants. Wearing them in winter one would not be warm; wearing them in summer one would not be cool.

"You make long spear-tipped halberds of twenty-four feet and short spear-tipped halberds of twelve feet. Your leather armored chariots block the doors; their wheels are covered and the hubs protected.¹ Looking at them they are certainly not beautiful to the eye; riding in them to hunt they are certainly not mobile. I do not know how you use them!

"If you are preparing them to advance into battle or withdraw and protect [the state] without seeking men capable of employing them, the situation is comparable to a nesting hen rushing at a fox or a puppy attacking a tiger. Even though they have great fighting spirit, they will die!

"In antiquity the ruler of the Ch'eng Sang clan cultivated Virtue but neglected military affairs, thereby leading to the extinction of his state. The ruler of the Yu Hu clan relied on his masses and loved courage and thus lost his ancestral altars. The enlightened ruler, observing this, will certainly nourish culture and Virtue within the domestic sphere while, in response to external situations, putting his military preparations in order. Thus when opposing an enemy force if you do not advance, you have not attained righteousness. When the dead lie stiff and you grieve for them, you have not attained benevolence."

Thereupon Marquis Wen personally arranged a mat for Wu Ch'i, and his wife presented him with a goblet of wine. The duke then made a sacrifice in the ancestral temple, announcing his intended employment of Wu Ch'i, and posted him as general-in-chief to protect the West River commandery. While

in command he fought seventy-six major battles with the other feudal lords, winning sweeping victories in sixty-four of them and faring no worse than a draw in the remainder. He expanded Wei's land in all four directions, broadening its territory some thousand *li*. All these were Wu Ch'i's accomplishments.

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Wu-tzu said: "In antiquity those who planned government affairs would invariably first instruct the hundred surnames and gain the affection of the common people.

"There are four disharmonies. If there is disharmony in the state, you cannot put the army into the field. If there is disharmony within the army, you cannot deploy into formations. If you lack harmony within the formations, you cannot advance into battle. If you lack cohesion during the conduct of the battle, you cannot score a decisive victory.²

"For this reason when a ruler who has comprehended the Way [Tao] is about to employ his people, he will first bring them into harmony, and only thereafter embark on great affairs. He will not dare rely solely on his own plans, but will certainly announce them formally in the ancestral temple, divine their prospects by the great tortoise shell, and seek their confirmation in Heaven and the seasons. Only if they are all auspicious will he proceed to mobilize the army.³

"Because the people know the ruler values their lives and is sorrowed by their deaths, when such circumstances arise and they must confront danger with him, the officers will consider death while advancing glorious, but life gained through retreating disgraceful."

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Wu-tzu said: "Now the Way [Tao] is the means by which one turns back to the foundation and returns to the beginning. Righteousness is the means by which to put affairs into action and realize accomplishments. Plans are the means by which to keep harm distant and gain profit. The essence [provides the constraints] by which to preserve duty and conserve achievements. Now if behavior does not accord with the Way [Tao], and actions do not accord with righteousness, but instead one dwells in magnificence and enjoys nobility, disaster will inevitably befall him.

"For this reason the Sage rests the people in the Way [Tao], orders them with righteousness, moves them with the forms of propriety [*li*], and consoles them with benevolence. Cultivate these four virtues and you will flourish. Neglect them and you will decline.

“Thus when Ch’eng T’ang extirpated the evil tyrant Chieh, Chieh’s people rejoiced, and when King Wu of Chou attacked the vile King Chou [of the Yin dynasty], the people of Yin did not condemn him. Because their actions accorded with Heaven and Man, they were able to succeed.”

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Wu-tzu said: “In general to govern the state and order the army, you must instruct them with the forms of propriety [*li*], stimulate them with righteousness, and cause them to have a sense of shame. For when men have a sense of shame, in the greatest degree it will be sufficient to wage war, while in the least degree it will suffice to preserve the state.”⁴

“Now being victorious in battle is easy, but preserving the results of victory is difficult.”⁵ Thus it is said that among the states under Heaven that engage in warfare, those that garner five victories will meet with disaster; those with four victories will be exhausted; those with three victories will become hegemony; those with two victories will be kings; and those with one victory will become emperors. For this reason those who have conquered the world through numerous victories are extremely rare, while those who thereby perished are many.”

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Wu-tzu said: “In general the reasons troops are raised are five: to contend for fame; to contend for profit; from accumulated hatreds; from internal disorder; and from famine. The names [of the armies]⁶ are also five: ‘righteous army,’ ‘strong army,’ ‘hard army,’ ‘fierce army,’ and ‘contrary army.’ Suppressing the violently perverse and rescuing the people from chaos is termed ‘righteousness.’ Relying on [the strength of] the masses to attack is termed ‘strong.’ Mobilizing the army out of anger is termed ‘hard.’ Abandoning the forms of propriety [*li*] and greedily seeking profit is termed ‘fierce.’ While the country is in turmoil and the people are exhausted, embarking on military campaigns and mobilizing the masses is termed ‘contrary.’ These five each have an appropriate Way [Tao]. In the case of the righteous you must use propriety to subjugate them. Toward the strong you must be deferential to subjugate them. Against the hard you must use persuasive language to subjugate them. Against the fierce you must employ deceit to subjugate them. Against the contrary you must use the tactical balance of power [*ch’üan*] to subjugate them.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “Could I hear about the Way [Tao] for ordering the troops, evaluating⁷ men, and making the state secure?” Wu Ch’i replied:

"The enlightened kings of antiquity always exerted every effort to maintain the forms of propriety [*li*] between themselves and their ministers, manifest the distinctions of rank, settle and assemble the officials and people, accord with their customs to instruct them, and select and recruit the talented in order to prepare for the unexpected.

"In the past Duke Huan of Ch'i⁸ enlisted the support of fifty thousand men and thereby attained hegemony over the feudal lords. Duke Wen of Chin summoned forty thousand men to serve as his lead troops and thereafter realized his intention [of becoming hegemon]. Duke Mu of Ch'in organized thirty thousand men into penetrating formations and subdued neighboring enemies.

"Thus the ruler of a strong state must evaluate his people. Among the people those who have courage and strength should be assembled into one unit. Those who take pleasure in advancing into battle and exerting their strength to manifest their loyalty and courage should be assembled into another unit. Those who can climb high and traverse far, who are nimble and fleet should be assembled into a unit. Officials of the king who have lost their positions and want to show their merit to their ruler should be assembled into a unit. Those who abandoned their cities or left their defensive positions and want to eradicate the disgrace should also be assembled into a unit. These five will constitute the army's disciplined, elite troops. With three thousand such men, from within one can strike out and break any encirclement or from without break into any city and slaughter the defenders."⁹

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Marquis Wu inquired: "I would like to hear about the Way [Tao] for making battle formations invariably stable, defenses inevitably solid, and victory in battle certain." Wu Ch'i replied: "This can immediately be made clear, but why ask only about this? If you are able to have worthy men hold high positions and the unworthy occupy low positions, then your battle formations will already be stable. If the people are settled in their farming and homes and [are] attached to their local authorities, then your defenses will already be solid. When the hundred surnames all acclaim my lord and condemn neighboring states, then in battle you will already be victorious."

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Once when Marquis Wu was planning government affairs, none of his numerous ministers could equal him. After dismissing the court he had a happy, self-satisfied look. Wu Ch'i entered and said: "Once in antiquity when King Chuang of Ch'u was planning state affairs, he discovered none of his ministers could equal his talents. After he had dismissed the court he wore a trou-

bled countenance. Duke Shen inquired: 'Why does your lordship have a troubled countenance?' He replied: 'I have heard it said that there is no lack of Sages in the world and no shortage of Worthies in a state. One who can get them to be his teachers will be a king, while one who has them as his friends can become a hegemon. Now I am not talented, yet none of my ministers can even equal me in ability. Our state of Ch'u is in deep trouble.' This is what the king of Ch'u found troublesome, yet you are pleased by it. I therefore dare to be fearful!" Marquis Wu immediately looked embarrassed.¹⁰

2. Evaluating the Enemy

Marquis Wu addressed Wu Ch'i: "At present Ch'in coerces me on the west, Ch'u encircles me in the south, Chao collides with me in the north, Ch'i encroaches on us in the east, Yen cuts off my rear, and Han occupies land to the front. Defending against the troops of six nations in all four directions, our strategic configurations of power [*shih*] is extremely disadvantageous. I am worried. What can be done about this?"

Wu Ch'i replied: "In general first being cautious is the true treasure in the Way [Tao] for ensuring the security of the state. As you have now awakened to the trouble, disaster can be kept away. Let me discuss the character and customs of these six countries."¹¹

"Although Ch'i's battle array is dense in number, it is not solid. That of Ch'in is dispersed, with the soldiers preferring to fight individually. Ch'u's formations have good order, but they cannot long maintain their positions. Yen's formations are adept at defense, but they are not mobile."¹² The battle arrays of the Three Chin are well controlled, but they prove useless.

"Now Ch'i's character is hard; their country is prosperous; the ruler and ministers are arrogant and extravagant and insulting to the common people. The government is expansive, but salaries are inequitable. Each formation is of two minds, with the front being heavy and the rear light. Thus while they are dense, they are not stable. The Way [Tao] to attack them is to divide them into three, harrying and pursuing the left and right, coercing and following them for then their formations can be destroyed.

"Ch'in's character is strong, the land treacherous, and the government severe. Their rewards and punishments are believed in; the people never yield but instead are all fiery and contentious. Thus they scatter and individually engage in combat. The Way [Tao] to attack them is to first entice them with profits for their soldiers are greedy and will abandon their generals to pursue them. Capitalizing on their misjudgment you can hunt down their scattered

ranks, establish ambushes, take advantage of the moment, and then their generals can be captured.

“Ch’u’s character is weak, its lands broad, its government troubling [to the people], and its people weary. Thus while they are well-ordered, they do not long maintain their positions. The Way [Tao] to attack them is to suddenly strike and cause chaos in the encampments. First snatch away their *ch’i*—lightly¹³ advancing and then quickly retreating, tiring and laboring them, never actually joining battle with them. Then their army can be defeated.

“Yen’s character is sincere and straightforward. Its people are careful; they love courage and righteousness and rarely practice deception in their plans. Thus they will defend their positions but are not mobile. The Way [Tao] to attack them is to strike and press them; insult them and then put distance between you; then race and get behind them so that their upper ranks will be doubtful and their lower ranks fearful. Be cautious about our chariots and cavalry, avoiding conflict on the open road, and then their general can be captured.

“The Three Chin are central countries. Their character is harmonious and their governments equitable. The populace is weary from battle but experienced in arms, and they have little regard for their generals. Salaries are meager, and as their officers have no commitment to fight to the death, they are ordered but useless. The Way [Tao] to attack them is to press [points in] their formations, and when large numbers appear oppose them. When they turn back, pursue them in order to wear them out. That then is the strategic configuration of power [*shih*] in these countries.

“Within the army you must have soldiers with the courage of tigers, the strength to easily lift tripods, and the fleetness of barbarian horses. To attack their flags and seize their generals you must have men with such abilities. If you have men such as these, select and segregate them [into special units]; favor and honor them. They are referred to as the ‘army’s fate.’ Those who are expert in the use of the five weapons,¹⁴ who are strong and quick and are intent on swallowing the enemy should be given rank and prominence for they can make victory decisive. If you are generous to their parents, wives, and children; encourage them with rewards; and awe them with punishments, these strong soldiers, when in formation, will solidly hold their positions for a long time. If you can discern and evaluate men such as these, you can attack a force double your strength.”

Marquis Wu exclaimed: “Good!”

Wu-tzu said: "In general when evaluating the enemy there are eight conditions under which one engages in battle without performing divination."¹⁵

"First, in violent winds and extreme cold, they arise early and are on the march while [barely] awake, breaking ice to cross streams, unfearing of any hardship."¹⁶

"Second, in the burning heat of midsummer, they arise late and without delay press forward in haste, through hunger and thirst, concentrating on attaining far-off objectives.

"Third, the army has been out in the field for an extended period; their food supplies are exhausted; the hundred surnames are resentful and angry; and numerous baleful portents have arisen, with the superior officers being unable to squash their effects.

"Fourth, the army's resources have already been exhausted; firewood and hay are scarce; the weather frequently cloudy and rainy; and even if they wanted to plunder for supplies, there is nowhere to go.

"Fifth, the number mobilized is not large; the terrain and water not advantageous; the men and horses both sick and worn out; and no assistance comes from their allies.

"Sixth, the road is far and the sun setting; the officers and men have labored long and are fearful. They are tired and have not eaten; having cast aside their armor, they are resting.

"Seventh, the generals are weak; the officials irresponsible; the officers and troops are not solid; the Three Armies are frequently frightened; and the forces lack any assistance.

"Eighth, their formations are not yet settled; their encampment [is] not yet finished; or they are traversing dangerous territory and narrow defiles, half concealed and half exposed.

"In these eight conditions attack them without any doubts.

"There are six circumstances in which, without performing divination, you should avoid conflict.

"First, the land is broad and vast, the people wealthy and numerous.

"Second, the government loves the people, the ruler's beneficence extends and flows [to all of them].

"Third, rewards are trusted, punishments based on investigation, and both are invariably implemented in a timely fashion.

"Fourth, people are ranked according to their military accomplishments; they award official positions to the Worthy and employ the able.

"Fifth, their forces are massive, and their weapons and armor are all first-rate.

“Sixth, they have the assistance of all their neighbors and the support of a powerful state.

“In general in these situations you are not a match for the enemy, so without doubt avoid them. This is what is meant by ‘seeing possibility and advancing, knowing difficulty and withdrawing.’”

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Marquis Wu inquired: “From external observation of the enemy I would like to know their internal character, from studying their advance know at what point they will stop in order to determine victory and defeat.¹⁷ May I hear about this?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “If the enemy approaches in reckless disarray, unthinking; if their flags and banners are confused and in disorder; and if the men and horses frequently look about, then one unit can attack ten of theirs, invariably causing them to be helpless.

“If the feudal lords have not yet assembled; ruler and ministers are not yet in agreement; ditches and embankments not yet complete; prohibitions and orders not yet issued; and the Three Armies clamoring—wanting to advance but being unable to, wanting to retreat but not daring to—then you can attack with half the enemy’s force and never lose in a hundred encounters.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “Is there a Way [Tao] by which the enemy can invariably be attacked?”

Wu Ch’i said: “In employing the army you must ascertain the enemy’s voids and strengths and then race [to take advantage of] his endangered points. When the enemy has just arrived from afar and their battle formations are not yet properly deployed, they can be attacked. If they have eaten but not yet established their encampment, they can be attacked. If they are running about wildly, they can be attacked. If they have labored hard, they can be attacked. If they have not yet taken advantage of the terrain, they can be attacked. When they have lost the critical moment and not followed up on opportunities, they can be attacked. When they have traversed a great distance and the rear guard has not yet had time to rest, they can be attacked. When fording rivers and only half of them have crossed, they can be attacked. On narrow and confined roads, they can be attacked. When their flags and banners move about chaotically, they can be attacked. When their formations frequently move about, they can be attacked. When a general is separated from his soldiers, they can be attacked. When they are afraid, they

can be attacked. In general in circumstances such as these, select crack troops to rush on them, divide your remaining troops, and continue the assault—pressing the attack swiftly and decisively.”

3. Controlling the Army

Marquis Wu asked: “In employing the troops what is primary?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “First make clear the four [principles] of lightness, the two of heaviness, and the one of belief.”

The Duke asked: “What do you mean?”

He replied: “You should arrange the employment of terrain so that it will be easy for the horses; the horses so that they will easily pull the chariots; the chariots so that they will easily convey the men; and the men so that they will easily engage in battle. If you are clear about treacherous and easy ground, then the terrain will be light for the horses. If they have hay and grain at the proper times, the horses will easily pull the chariots. If the axles are well greased, the chariots will easily convey the men. If the weapons are sharp and armor sturdy, the men will easily engage in battle. For advancing there should be generous rewards; for retreating heavy penalties; and they should both be properly implemented so that they will be believed in. If your examination can realize this, it will be the key to victory.”¹⁸

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Marquis Wu asked: “What measures will ensure the soldiers will be victorious?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “Control¹⁹ is foremost.”

Marquis Wu again asked: “It is not large numbers?”

“If the laws and orders are not clear, rewards and punishments not trusted; when sounding the gongs will not cause them to halt or beating the drum to advance, then even if you had one million men, of what use would they be? What is meant by control is that when stationary [in camp] they observe the forms of propriety [*li*] and when in action they are awesome. When they advance they cannot be withstood; when they withdraw they cannot be pursued. Their advancing and withdrawing are measured; the left and right flanks respond to the signal flags. Even if broken off from the main order they preserve their formations; even if scattered they will reform lines. They will hold together in peace; they will hold together in danger. Their number can be assembled together, but cannot be forced apart. They can be employed, but they cannot be exhausted. No matter where you can dispatch

them, no one under Heaven will be able to withstand them. They are called 'the troops of a father and son.'"²⁰

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Wu-tzu said: "In general the Way [Tao] to command an army on the march is to not contravene the proper measure of advancing and stopping; not miss the appropriate times for eating and drinking; and not completely exhaust the strength of the men and horses. These three are the means by which the troops can undertake the orders of their superiors. When the orders of superiors are followed, control is produced. If advancing and resting are not measured; if drinking and eating are not timely and appropriate; and if, when the horses are tired and the men weary, they are not allowed to relax in the encampment, then they will be unable to put the commander's orders into effect. When the commander's orders are thus disobeyed, when encamped they will be in turmoil, and in battle they will be defeated."

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Wu-tzu said: "In general, on the battlefield—soon to become a graveyard—if the soldiers are committed to fight to the death they will live, whereas if they seek to stay alive they will die. A good general will act as if [they are] in a sinking boat or trapped in a burning building—there is not enough time for the wise to make plans or the courageous to get angry. Only engaging the enemy will do! Thus it is said that the greatest harm that can befall the army's employment [stems from] hesitation, while the disasters that strike the Three Armies are born in doubt."

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Wu-tzu said: "Now men constantly perish from their inabilities and are defeated by the unfamiliar. Thus among the methods for using the military, training and causing them to be alert are first. One man who has been trained in warfare can instruct ten men. Ten men who have studied warfare can train one hundred men. And one hundred such men can train one thousand. One thousand, ten thousand; and ten thousand who have been trained in warfare can train the entire body of the Three Armies.

"With the nearby await the distant; with the well-ordered await the labored; with the surfeited await the hungry."²¹

"Have them deploy in circular formations, then change to square ones. Have them sit, then get up; move, then halt. Have them move to the left, then the right; forward and to the rear. Have them divide and combine, unite and

disperse. When all these changes are familiar, provide them with weapons. These are what are termed 'the general's affairs.'”

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Wu-tzu said: “The basic rule of warfare that should be taught is that men short in stature should carry spears and spear-tipped halberds, while the tall should carry bows and crossbows.²² The strong should carry the flags and banners; the courageous should carry the bells and drums. The weak should serve in supply work, while the wise should supervise the planning.

“Districts and villages should be organized together, with squads of five and ten forming the basis for mutual protection and guarantee. To a single drum beat they should prepare their weapons; to the double beat they should drill in various deployments; to a triple beat they should hasten to eat; to a quadruple beat they should have final inspection; and to a five-beat cadence they should move out. Only after you hear the drums sound in unison should you raise the banners.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “Is there a Way [Tao] for advancing and halting the Three Armies?”

Wu Ch'i replied: “Do not confront 'Heaven's Furnace' or 'Dragon's Head.' Heaven's Furnace is the mouth of a deep valley. Dragon's Head is the base of a high mountain. You should keep the Green Dragon banner on the left, White Tiger on the right, Vermillion Bird in the front, Mysterious Military to the rear, with Twinkler above from where military affairs will be controlled. When about to engage in combat determine the wind's direction. If favorable, yell and follow it; if contrary, assume a solid formation and await the enemy.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “In general are there methods for taking care of the chariots and cavalry?”²³

Wu Ch'i replied: “Now the horses must be properly settled, with appropriate grass and water and correct feeding so as to be neither hungry nor full. In the winter they should have warm stables, in the summer cool sheds. Their mane and hair should be kept trimmed and their hooves properly cared for. Blinders and ear protectors should be used so as to keep them from being startled and frightened. Practice their galloping and pursuit, exercise constraint over their advancing and halting. Men and horses must be attached to each other; only thereafter can they be employed.

“The equipment for the chariots and cavalry—such as saddles, bridles, bits, and reins—must all be complete and durable. Normally, the horses do not receive their injuries near the end of the battle but invariably they are injured at the start. Similarly, they are not injured so much by hunger as by being overfed. When the sun is setting and the road long, the riders should frequently dismount for it is better to have the men weary than to overlabor the horses. You should always direct movements so as to keep some strength in reserve against the enemy suddenly turning on us. Anyone who is clear about this can traverse the realm without hindrance.”

4. The Tao of the General

Wu-tzu said: “Now the commanding general of the Three Armies should combine both military and civilian abilities. The employment of soldiers requires uniting both hardness and softness. In general when people discuss generalship, they usually focus on courage. However, courage is but one of a general’s many characteristics for the courageous will rashly join battle with the enemy. To rashly join battle with an enemy without knowing the advantages and disadvantages is not acceptable. Now the affairs to which the general must pay careful attention are five: first, regulation; second, preparation; third, commitment; fourth, caution; and fifth, simplification. Regulation is governing the masses just as one controls a few. Preparation is going out the city gate as if seeing the enemy. Commitment means entering combat without any concern for life. Caution means that even after conquering, one maintains the same control and attitude as if just entering a battle. Simplification means the laws and orders are kept to a minimum and are not abrasive.

“To accept the mandate [of command] without ever declining, destroy the enemy, and only afterward speak about returning is the proper form of behavior [*li*] for a general. Thus when the army goes forth, his only thought should be of the glory that death will bring, not the shame of living.”

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Wu-tzu said: “In general warfare has four vital points: *ch’i*, terrain, affairs, and strength. When the masses of the Three Armies—the million soldiers of the forces—are strategically deployed in appropriate formations according to varying degrees of strength by one man, this is termed the ‘vital point [*chi*] of *ch’i*.’ When the road is narrow and the way perilous; when famous mountains present great obstacles; and if ten men defend a place one thousand cannot pass, this is termed a ‘vital point [*chi*] of earth.’ Being good at con-

trolling clandestine operatives; with a few light troops harassing the enemy, causing them to scatter; and forcing rulers and ministers to feel mutual annoyance and higher and lower ranks to reproach each other, this is termed the 'vital point [*chi*] of affairs.' When the chariots have solid axles and secure pins; the boats [have] well-suited rudders and oars; the officers are thoroughly familiar with the fighting formations; and the horses practiced in pursuit and maneuvers, this is termed the 'vital point [*chi*] of strength.' One who knows these four is qualified to be a general. However, his awesomeness, Virtue [*te*], benevolence, and courage must be sufficient to lead his subordinates and settle the masses. Furthermore, he must frighten the enemy and resolve doubts. When he issues orders, no one will dare disobey them. Wherever he may be, rebels will not dare oppose him. Gaining him, the state will grow strong; losing him, the state will perish. This is what is referred to as a good general."

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Wu-tzu said: "Now the different drums, gongs, and bells are the means to awe the ear; flags and banners, pennants and standards the means to awe the eye; and prohibitions, orders, punishments, and fines the means to awe the mind. When the ear has been awestruck by sound, it cannot but be clear. When the eye has been awestruck by color, it cannot but be discriminating. When the mind has been awestruck by penalties, it cannot but be strict. If these three are not established, even though you have the support of the state you will invariably be defeated by the enemy. Thus it is said that wherever the general's banners are, everyone will go, and wherever the general points, everyone will move forward—even unto death."²⁴

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Wu-tzu said: "In general the essentials of battle are as follows. You must first attempt to divine²⁵ the enemy's general and evaluate his talent. In accord with the situation exploit the strategic imbalance of power [*ch'üan*]; then you will not labor but will still achieve results. A commanding general who is stupid and trusting can be deceived and entrapped. One who is greedy and unconcerned about reputation can be given gifts and bribed. One who easily changes his mind and lacks real plans can be labored and distressed. If the upper ranks are wealthy and arrogant while the lower ranks are poor and resentful, they can be separated and divided. If their advancing and withdrawing are often marked by doubt and the troops have no one to rely on, they can be shocked into running off. If the officers despise the commanding general and are intent on returning home, by blocking off the easy

roads and leaving the treacherous ones open, they can be attacked and captured. If the terrain over which they advance is easy but the road for withdrawal difficult, they can be forced to come forward. If the way to advance is difficult but the road for retreating easy, they can be pressed and attacked. If they encamp on low wetlands where there is no way for the water to drain off, if heavy rain should fall several times, they can be flooded and drowned. If they make camp in a wild marsh or fields dense with a heavy tangle of grass and stalks, should violent winds frequently arise you can burn the fields and destroy them. If they remain encamped for a long time—the generals and officers growing lax and lazy, the army becoming unprepared—you can sneak up and spring a surprise attack.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “When our two armies are confronting each other but I do not know their general, if I want to fathom him what methods are there?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “Order some courageous men from the lower ranks to lead some light shock troops to test him. [When the enemy responds] they should concentrate on running off instead of trying to gain some objective. Then analyze the enemy’s advance, whether their actions—such as sitting and standing—are in unison and their organization well preserved; whether when they pursue your retreat they feign being unable to catch you, or when they perceive easy gain they pretend not to realize it. A commander like this may be termed a ‘wise general.’ Do not engage him in battle.

“If their troops approach yelling and screaming, their flags and pennants in confusion, while some of their units move of their own accord and others stop, some weapons held vertically, others horizontally—if they pursue our retreating troops as if they are afraid they will not reach us, or seeing advantage are afraid of not gaining it, this marks a stupid general. Even if his troops are numerous they can be taken.”

5. Responding to Change

Marquis Wu asked: “If the chariots are sturdy, the horses excellent, the generals courageous, and the soldiers strong, but when you suddenly encounter the enemy they are thrown into turmoil and break formation, what can be done?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “In general it is a rule of battle that during daylight hours the flags, banners, pennants, and standards provide the measure, while at night the gongs, drums, pipes, and whistles provide the constraints.²⁶ When

left is signaled, they should go left; when right, then right. When the drum is beaten, they should advance; when the gongs sound, they should halt. At the first blowing they should form ranks; at the second assemble together. Execute anyone who does not follow the orders. When the Three Armies submit to your awesomeness and the officers and soldiers obey commands, then in combat no enemy will be stronger than you, nor will any defenses remain impenetrable to your attack.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “If the enemy is numerous while we are few, what can I do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “Avoid them on easy terrain, attack them in narrow quarters. Thus it is said, for one to attack ten, nothing is better than a narrow defile. For ten to attack one hundred, nothing is better than a deep ravine. For one thousand to attack ten thousand, nothing is better than a dangerous pass.²⁷ Now if you have a small number of troops, should they suddenly arise—striking the gongs and beating the drums—to attack the enemy on a confined road, then even though his numbers are very great, they will all be startled and move about. Thus it is said, when employing larger numbers concentrate on easy terrain; when using small numbers concentrate on naturally confined terrain.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “Their forces are extremely numerous, martial, and courageous. Behind them are ravines and dangerous passes; on their right mountains; on the left a river. They have deep moats and high ramparts and are defending their position with strong crossbowmen. Their withdrawal is like a mountain moving, their advance like a tempest. As their food stocks are also plentiful, it will be difficult to defend against them for very long. What should be done?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “A great question indeed! This is not [a problem] of the strength of chariots and cavalry²⁸ but [of having] the plans of a Sage. If you can prepare one thousand chariots and ten thousand cavalry and support them with foot soldiers, you can divide them into five armies, each one traversing a different route. Now if the five armies simultaneously move along five different routes, the enemy will certainly be confused and will not know where to concentrate his efforts. If the enemy fortified his defenses in order to solidify his troops, quickly dispatch spies in order to observe their plans. If they listen to our persuasions, they will abandon their positions and depart. If they do not listen to our persuasions, they will kill our emissaries and

burn the treaties. Then divide your forces and engage them in five battles. However, if you win any of the battles do not pursue the retreating enemy. If you do not win then withdraw in extreme haste, thereby feigning a retreat. After reforming, swiftly attack them, with one force tying them up in the front, another cutting off their rear, while two of your armies move silently to the left and right flanks to suddenly attack them. If the five armies strike simultaneously, they will certainly gain the advantage. This is the Way [Tao] for attacking the strong.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “The enemy is nearby, pressing us. Even if I want to retreat, there is no road. My soldiers are terrified. What can I do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “The technique for dealing with this is as follows. If your troops are numerous and his few, divide them and attack. If, on the contrary, his troops are numerous and yours few, then use improvised measures to harry him, never giving him any rest. Then, even though he is numerous, he can be forced to submit.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “If I encounter the enemy in a deep valley where gorges and defiles abound to the sides, while his troops are numerous and ours few, what should I do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “Traverse hilly regions, forests, valleys, deep mountains, and vast wetlands quickly, departing from them posthaste. Do not be dilatory. If in high mountains or a deep valley the armies should suddenly encounter each other, you should first beat the drums and set up a clamor—taking advantage of it to advance your archers and crossbowmen, both shooting the enemy and taking prisoners. Carefully investigate their degree of control; if they are confused, then attack without doubt.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “On the left and right are high mountains, while the land is extremely narrow and confined. If when we meet the enemy we dare not attack them yet cannot escape, what shall we do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “This is referred to as ‘valley warfare.’ Even if your troops are numerous, they are useless. Summon your talented officers to confront the enemy, the nimble-footed and the sharpest weapons to be at the forefront. Divide your chariots and array your cavalry, concealing them on all four sides several *li* apart so that they will not show their weapons. The enemy will certainly assume a solid defensive formation, not daring either to

advance or retreat. Thereupon display your flags and array your banners, withdraw outside the mountains, and encamp. The enemy will invariably be frightened, and your chariots and cavalry should then harass them, not permitting them any rest. This is the Way [Tao] for valley warfare.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “If we encounter the enemy in a vast, watery marsh where the chariot wheels sink down to the point that the shafts are under water; our chariots and cavalry are floundering; and we have not prepared any boats or oars so we cannot advance or retreat, what should we do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “This is referred to as ‘water warfare.’ Do not employ chariots or cavalry, but have them remain on the side. Mount some nearby height and look all about. You must ascertain the water’s condition, know its expanse, and fathom its depth. Then you can conceive an unorthodox stratagem [*ch’i*] for victory. If the enemy begins crossing the water, press them when half have crossed.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “When it has been continuously raining for a long time so the horses sink into the mire and the chariots are stuck, while we are under enemy attack on all four sides and the Three Armies are terrified, what should I do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “In general desist from employing chariots when the weather is rainy and the land wet, but mobilize them when it is hot and dry. Value high terrain, disdain low ground. When racing your strong chariots, whether advancing or halting, you must adhere to the road. If the enemy arises, be sure to follow their tracks.”

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Marquis Wu asked: “If a savage raiding force suddenly appears—plundering our lands and fields, seizing our cattle and horses—what should I do?”

Wu Ch’i replied: “When a savage raiding force appears, you must carefully consider its strength and well maintain your defensive position. Do not respond to their attacks [by going out to engage them]. When they are about to withdraw at the end of the day, their packs will certainly be heavy and their hearts will invariably be afraid. In withdrawing they will concentrate on speed, and inevitably there will be stragglers. You should then pursue and attack them, and their troops can be overcome.”

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Wu-tzu said: "Now as to the Way [Tao] for attacking the enemy and besieging his cities: After his cities and towns have already been shattered, enter each of the palaces, take control of their bureaucrats, and collect their implements [of administration]. However, wherever your army goes do not cut down the trees, destroy houses, take the grain, slaughter the animals, or burn their supplies. Thus you will show the populace that you do not harbor vicious intentions. Accept those who seek to surrender and settle them."

6. Stimulating the Officers

Marquis Wu asked: "Is making punishments severe and rewards clear adequate for victory?"

Wu Ch'i replied: "As to these matters of severity and clarity I do not have all the answers. Even so, they are not what can be relied on. Now if when you issue commands and promulgate orders the people take pleasure in hearing them; when you raise the army and mobilize the masses the people take pleasure in battle; and when the weapons clash and blades cross the people take pleasure in death, then these three are what a ruler of men can rely on."

Marquis Wu asked: "How does one attain this result?"

Wu Ch'i answered: "You should identify men of accomplishment and honor them with a grand feast while also stimulating those who failed to accomplish anything notable."

Thereupon Marquis Wu had sitting mats set out in the ancestral temple hall, arrayed into three rows, and held a feast for the officers and chief officials. Those distinguished by their achievements sat in the front row and were feasted with the finest foods together with three meats served on the most valuable dishes. Those who ranked next in accomplishment sat in the middle row and were feasted with fine food served on less lavish vessels. Those who had not accomplished anything noteworthy sat in the last row and were feasted with fine food served on ordinary utensils. When the feast was over and they came out, he also honored the parents and families of the meritorious outside the temple gate, again according to their accomplishments. He annually sent emissaries to call on the families of those who had died in the service of the country, bestowing aid on their parents. By so doing he showed that they would not be forgotten.

After he had performed these actions for three years, Ch'in happened to mobilize its army and approach the West River commandery. When Wei's officers heard about it, those that buckled on their armor and enthusiastically

attacked them without waiting for any orders from their superiors numbered in the tens of thousands.

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Marquis Wu summoned Wu Ch'i and said: "Your previous instructions have all been effected."

Wu Ch'i replied: "I have heard that men have strengths and weaknesses, that their *ch'i* flourishes and ebbs. If your lordship is willing to test fifty thousand previously undistinguished men, I would like to lead them to engage the enemy. If Ch'in is not victorious, it will be laughed at by the feudal lords and lose the balance of authority [*ch'üan*] over the world."²⁹

"Now if there is a murderous villain hidden in the woods, even though one thousand men pursue him they all look around like owls and glance about like wolves. Why? They are afraid that violence will erupt and harm them personally."³⁰ Thus one man oblivious to life and death can frighten one thousand. Now if I can take a mass of fifty thousand and turn them into a single murderous villain, leading them to punish Ch'in, we will surely make it difficult for the enemy!"

Thereupon Marquis Wu assented to his plan, granting him another five hundred strong chariots and three thousand cavalry. They destroyed Ch'in's five-hundred-thousand-man army as a result of this policy to encourage the officers.

The day before the battle Wu Ch'i spoke to the Three Armies: "All the aides and officers must confront, follow, and capture the enemy's chariots, cavalry, and infantry. If the chariots do not make prisoners of the enemy's chariots, the cavalry does not make prisoners of the enemy's cavalry, and the infantry does not take the enemy's infantry, then even if we forge an overwhelming victory no one will be credited with any achievements." Thus on the day of the battle his orders were not onerous, but his awesomeness shook the world.